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## JOHN BROWN OF OSAWATOMIE.

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WHETHER John Brown was right in his invasion of Virginia, in 1859, is a question upon which good men may always differ. The movement was designed to excite insurrection among slaves, which in a legal sense may have been treason against the State. A number of men were killed, and a jury found the old commander guilty of murder. A rebellion that is successful is always washed clean of the stains of bloodshed and treason; but where the revolt is checked in its beginning, the leaders usually suffer immediately, and, for one reason or another, their names are seldom greatly honored. To John Brown the fates have been unusually kind. His story fell upon a time when the world was eager for a hero, and when the people of the northern United States must make one of whatever material came to hand. It will be remembered that we were ready, early in the war of the great rebellion, to worship General Scott, or General McClellan, or Sigel, or Fremont, or Grant,—anybody who would show any activity or earnestness in fighting the South, or any real hatred of slavery. To hate slavery, and to be ready to fight, these were the virtues in those days that, especially in New England's eyes, covered a multitude of sins. Here was a man who had fought slavery for years, in Kansas, in Missouri, in Virginia, and had died a martyr to his principles. The very fact that he had fought unlawfully added to his glory. No doctrine has ever been dearer to New England than the doctrine of the "higher law." This is an invisible and unwritten law which each man must find for himself, read and interpret for himself, and obey in his own way. If it leads him to disobey certain human enactments, so much the better; if it even leads him to treason and rebellion against his country, *he* at least is right, however wrong his acts may seem in the eyes of men. The acts of John Brown fitted this doctrine admirably;

indeed, he himself was no mean exponent of it, either with voice or pen. His defense of himself was on this line wholly. He had resisted "bogus" laws in Kansas; and the laws of Virginia sanctioning slavery were bogus also in his view. He was above all such laws; he had done right in breaking them; he had done no wrong even in killing men, because his motives were good. He scouted the idea of insanity, and he set his individual judgment against all the law books of Virginia, and staked his life on the issue.

The attitude was heroic. The man bore himself like a hero from the time his schemes failed till his death; and every word that he spoke was in such perfect accord with the doctrine of the higher law, that every sentence thrilled New England as though a prophet were speaking the very words of God. There arose in his defense, and to sing his praises, a company of men and women whose peers did not exist in America. They have made our history and written it, and they have made our literature. They made the public sentiment that abolished slavery. They held the pen that awakened those who bore the sword that preserved the Union. When these men said, John Brown is a hero and a saint, the bravest and the cleanest of all the heroes of ancient or modern times, there was nothing for it but to accept the verdict.

It was not accepted hastily. Very many newspapers lamented the affair at Harper's Ferry as extremely unfortunate; and "fanatic" and "crazy old man" were the terms commonly applied to the old hero for fully a year after his death by all except those who were known to hold extreme antislavery views. But during the war all was changed: these extremists became our trusted leaders, and their version of the John Brown affair became accepted history, and, as such, it has passed into encyclopædias and biographical dictionaries, not only in this country, but in England and Europe. The war has now been over for nearly twenty years. A new generation is upon the stage reading and thinking, and the deeds of Old John Brown have a new interest as they pass again under review taking the form of final history. It is a time of revaluation of our war heroes, and some will gain in our estimation, and some, no doubt, will lose. This younger generation that is weighing, and sifting, and revaluing the deeds and characters of the men of twenty years ago may not love truth more than those who made the records that

we read, but they probably need heroes less. The *Zeit-geist* has now more to say of science and fact, than of right or valor. Not that these latter terms are meaningless, nor that there is forgetfulness of what they signify, nor indifference toward such conceptions in ethics or qualities in men; but the keenness of interest now is all in the direction of getting at the exact facts of every case, let them be what they may.

Under the influence of this spirit there has been a growing impression that the deeds of John Brown do not warrant all the eulogies that have been pronounced upon him. Emerson spoke of him as the "saint whose martyrdom will make the gallows glorious like the cross."\* Thoreau said, "He could not have been tried by his peers, for his peers did not exist." Theodore Parker wrote from Rome, "Brown will die, I think, like a martyr and also like a saint. . . . None of the Christian martyrs died in vain; and from Stephen, who was stoned at Jerusalem, to Mary Dyer, whom our fathers hanged on a bough of 'the great tree' on Boston Common, I think there have been few spirits more pure and devoted than John Brown's, and none that gave up their breath in a nobler cause. Let the American State hang his body, and the American Church damn his soul, still the blessing of such as are ready to perish will fall on him, and the universal justice of the infinitely perfect God will take him welcome home. The road to heaven is as short from the gallows as from a throne, perhaps also as easy." These men were the radical abolitionists of the time, to be sure; but as has been already said, their words and sentiments were adopted during the war period by the entire North, and since then largely by the civilized world.

But to the average citizen of to-day such extravagant eulogy of a doubtful character is distasteful. The mention of the name of John Brown no longer brings down the house, and for two or three years a spirit of doubt has been slowly spreading eastward from Kansas whether the man deserves any eulogy whatever. John Brown was a disturbing influence in Kansas from the first. He went to the territory not as a settler, but to fight. His voice was always for war, and he probably was more anxious to fight Missouri than to make Kansas free. Those who had gone to Kansas to make homes and build a State naturally felt very dif-

\* As quoted in Redpath's *Life of Brown*, page 4. The present writer would be glad to know that Emerson did not use just this language.

ferently. They would fight if it became necessary in support of their principles, or in defense of their rights; but a general war with Missouri, or the South, was last and least among the things desired or hoped for.

It will be remembered that the first territorial legislature was elected fraudulently by voters who actually lived in Missouri. This body of law-makers assembled first at Pawnee in July, 1855, but immediately moved to Shawnee Mission, near the Missouri border, where they completed their labors in a proslavery atmosphere and in the most shameless proslavery fashion,—establishing the entire code of Missouri as the laws of Kansas and adding whatever beside they could think of that they believed would aid in the establishment of slavery in the territory. These were the “bogus” laws resisted from the first by the Free State party, but they received in due time the approval and sanction of President Pierce. Then it became a very serious question what was to be done. A few extremists were in favor of resisting these laws to the bitter end, even to the point of fighting United States troops. But the wiser and more moderate policy of submitting for the present and fighting out differences at the ballot-box finally prevailed, having all along had the support of the very best citizens, even the most earnest abolitionists. John Brown was among those who scouted the voting policy and urged an armed resistance to the fraudulently enacted laws. Not that his voice was heard in the councils of the time, as he was then an unknown and unnoticed man, but it was afterward remembered that he had always been numbered among the revolutionists. The leaders of this fighting party, so far as it can be called a party, were not citizens generally but correspondents of Eastern newspapers, and people who, in various ways, lived upon money sent from the East to help make Kansas a free state.

On the 21st of May, 1856, occurred what is known in history as the sacking of Lawrence. The Free State Hotel was shot through with cannon balls and afterward burned. The two Free State printing-offices were destroyed, many private houses pillaged, and that of Dr. Robinson, then “governor,” according to the Topeka or Free State faction, burned. This was done by a band of nearly eight hundred men, partly United States troops commanded by Federal officers, but largely a mob of men from nearly all the Southern States, who had come on their own account to “wipe out the abolition town.” There was no resist-

ance, and nobody was killed except by accident. A peace policy had been resolved upon and was strictly carried out by the Free State men, though it cost them heavily that day.

While these events were taking place in Lawrence, two companies of riflemen were being organized in the adjoining counties of Franklin and Miami to come to the defence of the ill-fated town; these were the Osawatomie company, commanded by a Mr. Dayton, and the Potawatomie company, whose captain was John Brown, Jr. Both companies started for Lawrence, and they met on the way and continued their march all night. On the morning of the 22d, old John Brown was with these armed men near Palmyra, within twelve miles of Lawrence. It is not quite certain whether he started with one of the companies or whether he met them on the way. On this Thursday morning they heard that Lawrence had fallen on the day before, and were undecided most of the day whether to go forward or return. It was toward the evening of this day, in the camp of his son's company on Ottawa Creek, that old John Brown called for volunteers "to begin the war in earnest." He wanted only brave men, and men who would obey him implicitly. There was hardly any response to this call, perhaps not a single man answered. But the old warrior was not to be baffled. He had five sons present and a son-in-law; these, at least, he could command. John, Jr., however, protested against the movement, saying that the men could not be spared, as they were now near the enemy. Then the other four sons, Owen Brown, Watson Brown, Frederick Brown, and Oliver Brown, and the son-in-law, Henry Thompson, went into camp by themselves, with their father and captain, and spent most of the next day (Friday) in grinding their sabers. About noon, old John Brown went to a man by the name of James Townsley, who was in one of the rifle companies, and who had a wagon and team, and asked him if he would, with his wagon, take a company of men back to the Potawatomie that afternoon. Townsley agreed to do so, not knowing what was to be done. So, at about two o'clock they started, with their rifles and revolvers all loaded and their swords newly sharpened. It is said that they were cheered on their departure by the rifle companies, which is not unlikely, as the nature of their expedition was not known. John Brown, Jr., however, said, "Father, be careful; do nothing rash." Townsley had in his wagon only the Brown family, including the son-in-law, Thompson. There

was another man in the company, whose name was Winer, who rode a pony; whether he had volunteered and agreed to obey or not, we do not know. It is not probable that any of the men at this time knew exactly what they were going to do. It was the Brown family obeying their father, as in duty bound, with a teamster in their employ and a neighbor joined to the expedition, probably because it was going toward his home.

When they camped that night they were near the Potawatomie Creek, and here old John Brown revealed his plans for the "war." He asked Townsley to guide them up the creek some four or five miles, into the neighborhood where he lived, and show them the houses of all the proslavery men, saying that it was his intention to sweep the creek as he came down of all the proslavery men living on it. Townsley refused to become even the guide of any such expedition. On account of this refusal the party staid in camp all that night and the next day, talking the matter over. It seemed to Townsley, and probably also to some of the other young men, that this sort of killing was murder. Old John Brown urged that it was necessary as a war measure: it was time for the war to begin in earnest; war there must be to abolish slavery; God had foreordained him to begin it. Once a decisive blow was struck, the fatal peace policy inaugurated at Lawrence would be at an end, and the Free-State men would be obliged to unite and fight Missouri. The end of the matter was, that late on Saturday evening Townsley yielded, either to force or argument, and acted as guide upon an expedition much less extensive than had been originally planned, but sufficient, surely, to cover the name of John Brown with infamy forever.

The first victims of this murderous foray were found in a family named Doyle, residing on Musquito Creek, which empties into the Potawatomie. Here Townsley, Winer, and Frederick Brown remained outside the house, while the Captain and the rest of his family entered and brought out James P. Doyle and his two sons, Drury and William. These "prisoners" were taken along the road toward "Dutch Henry's" for about two hundred yards. Here the Captain gave the order for their slaughter, but it was either misunderstood or disobeyed. Old John Brown then himself drew his pistol and shot the father, James Doyle, in the forehead. Watson and Oliver Brown then fell upon the younger Doyles, and William fell dead at the first cut of one of those murderous heavy sabers. Drury Doyle started to run to

the house, but was overtaken by his assailant and cut down. There was a younger brother of the Doyles, then sixteen years of age, in the house, whose life was spared at his mother's tearful entreaty.

From this place the "Northern army," as the commander styled the little band, proceeded down the creek to the house of Allen Wilkinson, which was entered in the same manner and by the same men. Mrs. Wilkinson was at the time sick with the measles. When the men rapped at the door, she begged her husband not to open it. The men outside asked him to come out and show them the way to Dutch Henry's. He replied that he could tell them just as well without opening the door. The Browns then commanded him to surrender in the name of the "Northern army," and to open the door or they would break it open. The door was opened, and four men entered and searched the house for arms, taking a gun and powder-flask. They then told Mr. Wilkinson to put on his clothes and go with them. He protested, saying that his wife was sick, and that he would remain at home and be ready to answer to any charge against him whenever wanted. Mrs. Wilkinson entreated, but the Captain said, "It matters not," and marched her husband away, without even giving him time to put on his boots. He was killed about one hundred and fifty yards from the house by the younger Browns, acting under the Captain's orders.

At about two o'clock in the morning the party reached Dutch Henry's Crossing, and knocked at the door of a house where were four men sleeping and a woman and children. The names of the men were James Harris, William Sherman, Jerome Glanville, and John S. Whiteman. The "Northern army" announced itself as usual, commanded surrender, inquired about other proslavery men, about arms, saddles, horses, and whether the men present had ever aided proslavery men in coming to the Territory, or done the Free-State party any harm, or intended to do it any harm. Satisfactory answers were received from Harris and Whiteman, and they were allowed to remain where they were found. William Sherman was killed in the same manner as the younger Doyles and Wilkinson. The horrible gashes made by the broadswords or sabers of the Browns gave rise to the story that the victims were mutilated; but there is no reason to think that the bodies were hacked or cut after life was extinct. The "Northern army" now, with a single prisoner, Jerome Glanville,



retraced its steps to the camp of the previous evening, where the wagon and horses had been left. They breakfasted there and remained in camp till nearly noon.

As the early light of that Sunday morning, May 25, 1856, came over that new land, so lately a wilderness, showing here and there at wide intervals a cabin, with a little field of planted ground, it revealed five ghastly corpses lying in the grass. Two widows, with their fatherless children, were weeping over their dead. They knew then what the world does not know even yet, that this was the work of John Brown. And the same morning light found the stern commander of the army of seven in camp with his men and prisoner. As he lifts his hands to heaven to ask a blessing on the food, the "dried" blood of his victims is seen upon them by the prisoner. The prisoner was set at liberty during the morning, but was a little too free in what he said about the Browns, and was shot not long afterward, near Black Jack, while on his way to Kansas City in a wagon. His death was, of course, attributed to the Browns, but this is not clearly established, and probably never can be. He may have been mistaken about the blood on the old man's hands as a literal fact, but the stain upon his character from that night's work can never be washed away. And it ought not to be forgotten, overlooked, nor forgiven. It is right at this late day to publish it to all the world, and let the story have its full effect upon the young who are forming their estimate of the man.

The story as here related is true beyond a doubt in all essential particulars. It rests upon the testimony of no single witness, but upon the perfect agreement of many. Its truth was confessed by Brown himself explicitly upon one occasion, implicitly many times. The killing of these men was never attributed to anybody else, and nobody in Kansas doubts that it was done under John Brown's authority.

The community at first was startled and shocked by the reports of these midnight murders. Old John Brown and his company of seven arrived at the camp they had left on Ottawa Creek about midnight between Sunday and Monday after the assassinations. The news was known there the next morning, and John Brown, Jr., immediately resigned his command of the rifle company, mounted his horse and rode away home. He was soon after arrested for this crime and severely used, it is said, being driven, chained, many miles in the hot sun until he became

insane. His father used to show the chain in the East on his money-raising excursions, and showed great emotion in narrating John Junior's sufferings and consequent insanity. He may well have shown emotion. That son suffered for his father's crime, which at that very time he was hiding and denying. Insane, a raving maniac, for awhile John Junior certainly was, as his fellow-prisoners testify. And the form of his raving was all connected with this affair. "When the conversation turned, as it sometimes did, upon the Potawatomie murder, and we attempted to excuse his father for that act, giving the mitigating circumstances current among the Free-State men at the time, his eyes would sparkle with unwonted brilliancy, his manner would assume the wildest excitement, and, in a loud and boisterous voice, which was uncommon to him, he would exclaim: 'Do not attempt to offer anything in palliation of such a crime. Nothing can excuse it. It was unequaled in atrocity and displayed only cowardice. Had the same deed been done in open day it would have shown more manliness, but to call men from their beds at midnight and to cut them down in cold blood is infinitely more savage than was the chopping in pieces by a drunken rabble of R. P. Brown at Easton.' And thus he would run on for a long time, much more vehemently than we can possibly describe." So speaks G. W. Brown, a fellow-prisoner, in the "*Herald of Freedom*" for November 5, 1859. The condemnation of old John Brown in this is a little too methodical for madness, it may be; but there are other witnesses that his ravings were like this in substance.

The effect of these murders was very great upon the community and on the fortunes of Kansas; but it was not at all what the commander of the "Northern army" anticipated. He expected to precipitate a revolution; but instead of this, the abolitionists of Lawrence, even, almost unanimously denounced the deed. Public resolutions were passed concerning the matter, lamenting it as most unfortunate. The Missourians, however, came on, inflamed with righteous wrath, hunting old John Brown and his boys, ready to shoot them at sight. Frederick they did shoot thus, and they burned the cabins of all the Browns and all their kin, drove away their stock, and took vengeance upon them in whatever ways they could. Brown's resistance, and how he fought at Black Jack, are well known. It is not generally understood, however, that all this fighting at Osawatomie and Black Jack grew out of the Potawatomie

assassinations. The impression was really made in the East at the time, and has prevailed since, that the Potowatomie affair was in retaliation for these abuses and outrages committed upon the Browns by the Border Ruffians. But our theme now is not so much the effect of this affair upon Kansas as its bearing upon the character of Brown himself and its importance as a factor in making up our judgment concerning his career and greatness. Still, if the result of those murders had been good, and had that good been foreseen and foretold by Brown, it would be something in his favor. But this cannot be said. What Brown thought he foresaw never came; there was no revolution, and not a slave was freed. Only evil to Kansas resulted, so far as can be judged with any sort of certainty.

The effect of this crime upon the character and career of old John Brown was pervasive, decisive, overwhelming. After that night he knew that his life was forfeit; and he fought, and begged, and planned with a desperateness born of his danger. He could not live in Kansas, he could not live safely or peacefully anywhere. He must fight on to the end now. The Rubicon was passed. He cut off his long beard, probably as a disguise, and sought help in New England, reciting the woes of his family, but concealing their cause. His desperate earnestness won the confidence and the hearts of some of New England's greatest and noblest men. Had they known fully what he was and what he had done, or even what he intended, they would not have armed and helped him as they did.

In 1857, it was believed in Kansas that there was a secret plot for the massacre of the members of the Lecompton Constitutional Convention. This convention was very odious to the Radical wing of the Free-State party. Old John Brown was at the time hovering on the border of Missouri, in Iowa, waiting for a signal to come and assist in the bloody work. The plot was discovered and failed, and again Brown was disappointed. Such a plot, had it been executed, would have been in the line of his plans and expectation. Such was his idea of beginning a war against the South. After this failure, he ventured again into Kansas, and made a sudden raid into Missouri and captured some slaves, which he took safely to Canada. A peaceable and unarmed man was killed on this excursion—not intentionally, it is said. But Brown referred to the matter in his dying speech, and said these

slaves were freed without harm to any one, "without even the snapping of a gun." His accounts of his exploits before his Eastern friends, never modest, were seldom truthful. The real hero of Black Jack was Captain Shore. Osawatomie was not a victory, but a defeat of the Free-State party, and no particular bravery was shown by anybody. Old John Brown ran away in time to save his life, which was all well enough; only there is a popular impression that he did great things at the "Battle of Osawatomie." That fight, the pillage, and the burning were in consequence of his crimes, and for the whole he deserves censure rather than praise.

At the time of Brown's execution in Virginia, which was called in Boston his public murder, while the deluded abolitionists were exalting to the skies a man they did not know, a Free State paper, "The Herald of Freedom" of Lawrence, was printing the plain unvarnished truth about him and begging the Republicans of America not to make a hero of him. Boston replied: "Of course, the *small men* in Kansas can see no greatness in Brown. Those who live near a hero never know him, he is often rejected by all of his generation. The distant view is the true view. Here we get the man in true perspective and his greatness is clear as sunlight." Against these generalities we will not argue, for they doubtless contain a measure of truth; but as applied to Brown they are fallacious wholly. Viewed in the largest possible way, there is little that is admirable in this man's character; and if our civilization is worth anything, his entire public or fighting career is to be utterly condemned. It was right for Free-State citizens in Kansas to defend their homes; but old John Brown never had a home there to defend, and his influence led most of his sons to early graves. It may have been justifiable to steal slaves from their masters and free them; such is the writer's opinion; but in this sort of work Brown never acted with any discretion, not even with common good sense, if freeing the slaves had been his chief object. But his real object, from the fatal night on the Potawatomie till his death, was to provoke the South and to commit the North to violence and bring on a war. He did not do it; and, dispassionately weighed after twenty years, the verdict of thoughtful men must be that his influence in bringing on the war that afterward came was infinitesimal. That war was brought on by Northern votes and Southern secession. The war sentiment caught up the name of

Brown and glorified it, but the man himself was all wrong in principle and practice.

His principles were those of the Russian nihilists—first make a clean sweep of the present civilization, and let the future build what it can. Surely such a man is not a proper hero for the youth of our country to worship, and we believe that as his true history, too long concealed, becomes known, admiration for him will be changed to disgust, and disgust to anger, that we have been so long deceived.

DAVID N. UTTER.